

What is hepatitis C?

Hepatitis C is a liver disease caused by the hepatitis C virus (HCV), which is found in the blood of persons who have this disease. The infection is spread by contact with the blood of an infected person.

How serious is hepatitis C?

Hepatitis C is serious for some persons, but not for others. Most persons who get hepatitis C carry the virus for the rest of their lives. Most of these persons have some liver damage, but many do not feel sick from the disease. Some persons with liver damage due to hepatitis C may develop cirrhosis (scarring) of the liver and liver failure, which may take many years to develop.

How can I protect myself from getting hepatitis C and other diseases spread by contact with human blood?

- Don't ever shoot drugs. If you shoot drugs, stop and get into a treatment program. If you can't stop, never reuse or share syringes, water, or drug works, and get vaccinated against hepatitis A and hepatitis B.
- Do not share toothbrushes, razors, or other personal care articles. They might have blood on them.
- If you are a health care worker, always follow routine barrier precautions and safely handle needles and other sharps. Get vaccinated against hepatitis B.
- Consider the health risks if you are thinking about getting a tattoo or body piercing. You can get infected if:
 - the tools that are used have someone else's blood on them.
 - the artist or piercer doesn't follow good health practices, such as washing hands and using disposable gloves.

HCV can be spread by sex, but this does not occur very often. If you are having sex, but not with one steady partner:

- You and your partners can get other diseases spread by having sex (e.g., AIDS, hepatitis B, gonorrhea or chlamydia).
- Use latex condoms correctly and every time.
- Get vaccinated against hepatitis B.
- The surest way to prevent the spread of any disease by sex is not to have sex at all.

Hepatitis C virus is NOT spread by:

- breast feeding
- hugging
- food or water
- sharing eating utensils or drinking glasses
- sneezing
- coughing
- casual contact

Many people who are at risk for hepatitis C are at risk for hepatitis A and hepatitis B. Check with your doctor to see if you should get hepatitis A and hepatitis B vaccines.

There is no vaccine to prevent hepatitis C

HEPATITIS C
Prevention

Could I already have hepatitis C?

Ask your doctor for a blood test for hepatitis C if:

- you **ever** injected street drugs, even if you experimented a few times many years ago.
- you were treated for clotting problems with a blood product made before 1987.
- you received a blood transfusion or solid organ transplant (e.g., kidney, liver, heart) before July 1992, or you were notified that you received blood that possibly contained HCV.
- you were ever on long-term kidney dialysis.

Why should I be tested for hepatitis C?

Early diagnosis is important so you can:

- be checked for liver disease.
- get treatment, if indicated. Drugs are licensed for the treatment of persons with long-term hepatitis C.
- learn how you can protect your liver from further harm.
- learn how you can prevent spreading HCV to others.

For information on viral hepatitis:

access our website at
<http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/diseases/hepatitis/>
or call the Hepatitis Hotline at
1-888-4HEPCDC
1-888-443-7232

or write
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
Hepatitis Branch, Mailstop G37
Atlanta, GA 30333
or
Contact your state or local health department

HEPATITIS C PREVENTION

ALMOST 4 MILLION
AMERICANS ARE
INFECTED WITH
HEPATITIS C VIRUS

This information will help you to understand what hepatitis C is and how to prevent getting it. read this to see if you should have a blood test for hepatitis c.



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& HUMAN SERVICES

